

REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD
BOARD MEETING
March 20, 2025

Via Video Conference

Welcome, and Roll Call: Chairman Chuck Berry called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. Eastern time.

Board Members in Attendance: Charles Fowler, Chuck Berry, Renee Beutell, Mike Jones, JoLynn Stroda, Jan Hupp, Ryan Tyce, and Gary Thomas

Board Members not in Attendance: Derek Ahl, Jane Neubauer, Kari Puffer, Chris Aldrich

USDA Representative in Attendance: George Webster

Staff in Attendance: Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski

Agenda

Marsha Gray requested that the following items be added: Under Finance Committee, item C. CDARS Recommendation. Under Promotion Committee, item C. Virtual Field Trips.

It was **MOVED** by Mike Jones and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowlers to approve the agenda as presented.

MOTION APPROVED.

Meeting Minutes

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to approve the February 16, 2025 Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman's Report –

- Chuck Berry thanked the Board for responding to the change in the April meeting. It will take place on Tuesday, April 15th, so the Budget can be approved and submitted to USDA on time.
- Chuck Berry and Mike Jones sent Rick Dungey and the NCTA Board a letter. It was well received, and Berry received correspondence in return. Berry feels it is the beginning steps of a better relationship moving forward.
- Berry shared that Chris Aldrich's father passed away - thoughts and prayers for Chris and his family.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee – Mike Jones reported.

- a. **February 2025 Financials** - Jones provided a detailed overview of the February 2025 financials.
- b. **Fiscal Year 2025-26 Budget Process**—Jones shared that the final budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year is due to USDA for approval by April 15th. The Finance Committee will work on this in the next two weeks.
- c. **CDARS Recommendation** – Jones requested that the Board allow the Executive Committee /Finance Committee to reinvest the \$800,000 CDARS when it is up for renewal.

It was **MOVED** by Mike Jones and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to allow the Finance Committee / Executive Committee to have the authority to reinvest the \$800,000 CDARS. **MOTION APPROVED.**

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Gary Thomas to accept the February 2025 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Research Committee – Renee Beutell and Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Update on Research Contracts and Completed Projects** – Knudson shared that all funded research contracts for the 2025-26 fiscal year have been signed. Annual performance reports will go out in May.
- b. **RFP Process** - The FY 2025-26 RFP is scheduled to be released at the beginning of May, based on when USDA approves the FY 2025-26 budget.
- Renee Beutell shared that Research Committee members have been secured. Knudson will send the final list to Marsha Gray and Chuck Berry for approval.

Industry Relations Committee - Gary Thomas and Marsha Gray reported in Chris Aldrich's absence.

- a. **Committee Meeting Schedule** - Gary Thomas shared that the Industry Relations Committee will have its first meeting on Tuesday, April 8th, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern. The agenda has been set. The Committee members have been secured and submitted to Marsha Gray and Chuck Berry for approval.
- b. **Annual Report** - Marsha Gray shared that the annual report has been created, is in the design phase, and will then be sent to the printer.
- c. **Summer Meeting Plan** - Marsha Gray shared that the RCTB has secured the \$300.00 coffee and donut sponsorship at the Michigan Summer Association meeting in July. The Michigan Association has donated a vendor booth for the RCTB. A question was raised whether the NCTA and the RCTB could be in the same realm of space. Gray will contact the Michigan Association to confirm.

Governance Committee – Charles Fowler reported.

- a. **Update on Recommended Changes to Order** - George Webster shared that the new political appointees are in position. The Office of General Counsel (OGC) had questions regarding rulemaking and executive language. When a rule is published in the Federal Register, the first few paragraphs mention an executive order and why this rulemaking is authorized. As soon as there is a firm date for the Order to be published in the register, Webster will update the Board.

Compliance Committee – Marsha Gray reported in Derek Ahl's absence.

- a. **Update** – Gray shared an update regarding Jim Lantz's efforts. Lantz has communicated with the three audit candidates; they are all cooperating and working to schedule their audit. Gray shared that there was an outstanding audit from last year due to the non-responsive producer, which has now been turned over to USDA. George Webster stated that USDA would send a letter within the next week to start the process. If no response is received, it will be moved to the legal department.
- Contractor Jamie Hanselman has been working on contacting producers who have yet to report their 2024 harvest. All producers received a grower letter in mid-December, a postcard in mid-January, and three direct emails.

Promotion Committee – Marsha Gray reported in Jane Neubauer's absence.

- a. **Committee Feedback Meeting** – Gray shared that on March 4th, the Promotion Committee met after reviewing all the final materials from the 2024 campaign with a good feedback session. The Committee and FleishmanHillard will reconvene to start planning for the 2025 campaign.
- b. **2025 Campaign Planning** – Gray shared that the campaign planning for the 2025 season will begin on the first of May once the budget has been secured. The Promotion Committee came in \$20,000/\$40,000 under budget for the 2024 campaign.
- c. **Virtual Farm Tours** – JoLynn Stroda reported that the virtual farm tour committee is working to produce a tour for Arbor Day. Stroda is in the process of finding a farm or nursery that can show the planting and seedling side of Christmas trees.

Management Staff Update – Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Report** - As of March 19, the RCTB had received 986 payers through the

lockbox and online portal for \$1,090,995.76 and Importer Assessments received via US Customs for \$221,617.21, totaling \$1,312,613.21.

- Gray shared that she has had positive interactions with Rick Dungey with NCTA. Dungey and Gray discussed briefly the idea of the NCTA hosting the RCTB retail locator as a widget on their website. Dungey will present the idea to their Board.

New Business: There was no new business to come before the Board.

USDA – George Webster reported.

- a. **Status—Non-responding Importer** - Webster shared that new political appointees are in position, and the Legal Department is moving forward. The Legal Department has received all the information, along with updated numbers.
- b. **Status – Recommended Order Changes** – Webster covered the Order changes under the Governance Committee report.

For the Good of the Order/ Announcement:

- Chuck Berry thanked the Board for their efforts.
- Mike Jones asked the Board for their thoughts and ideas on how the new tariffs may impact RCTB assessment income...

Meeting Schedule:

- a. **Future Meeting Schedule** – The next meeting of the RCTB will be held on Tuesday, April 15, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.
- b. **Summer In-Person Meeting** – July 24, 2025 – Dutchman Tree Farms, Manton, Michigan, in conjunction with the National Christmas Tree Association meeting.

Adjourn:

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 11:49 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,
JoLynn Stroda
Secretary